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A FRENCH MASTER

BY MARGUERITE TRACY

With original illustrations by Jules Lefebvre.

FAR back in the seventies, when some of our best known artists were still studying abroad, Jules Lefebvre taught drawing at l'École des Beaux-Arts, as he teaches it in Julien's to-day. He was known then, as he is known now, for the perfect accuracy which was always to be found in his own work, and which he sternly required of his pupils. There is indeed a story of one student, a man past middle-age, who had been studying at the school for fifteen years or more, who ventured to begin to paint a little, and to him Lefebvre came and said : "Go back to your drawing. You are not in the school to paint pictures, but to learn how to draw."

It is only the weak and timid who are discouraged and fall back, and since these are sooner or later bound to be the losers in the race, perhaps it is as well that they should not set out. The wise stay long enough to get command of the technique, which is obtained nowhere else so thoroughly, and then—to nature !

Nevertheless, it is Lefebvre's own expressed regret that he devoted himself with so single a mind to academic form, and neglected the study of nature. But he formed himself at the time when no one dreamed of studying nature in itself. Classic standards and measurements prevailed like iron laws. In painting, there was not even law, but many theories obtained, and chief among them was a rooted prejudice against bright color. It was not until 1869, when Henri Regnault and Carolus Duran exhibited portraits vivid with color and life, that the enthusiasm of the younger men broke into open revolt against old creeds ; and when Regnault died like a hero on the battle-field, during the siege of Paris, color became to them a sacred charge. It was at this time, too, that the great word "values" began to be heard in the schools, and logical, ethical art took a swift bound forward. It was at this time, in 1870, I think, that Lefebvre received the cross of



DIANA SURPRISED



ANTIQUE POESY

the Legion of Honor. His wonderful "Truth," painted in 1869, hangs in the Luxembourg—a woman holding a mirror high above her head; and the superb line from her foot straight up the lifted arm has been the delight and the despair of students ever since.



SALOME



UNDINE



CLÉMENCE ISAURE

Lefebvre was born in Tournan in 1836, and began his studies at l'École Municipale d'Amiens, under M. Léon Cogniet. At the Universal Exposition of 1855, in Paris, he exhibited the portrait of his first drawing-master, M. Fusilier. In 1861, his picture "La Mort de Priam" brought him the Prix de Rome, and from that time until he received the cross of the Legion of Honor he won a succession of medals. His medal at the Salon was awarded for a portrait in contemporaneous costume.

Since that time he has painted portraits of almost all the people prominent in society abroad and here, and some of his paintings were among the "Portraits of



A READER

Women" at the National Academy of Design in New York, in the autumn of 1894. The picture of the child with the book, which is reproduced on this page, is also owned in this country.

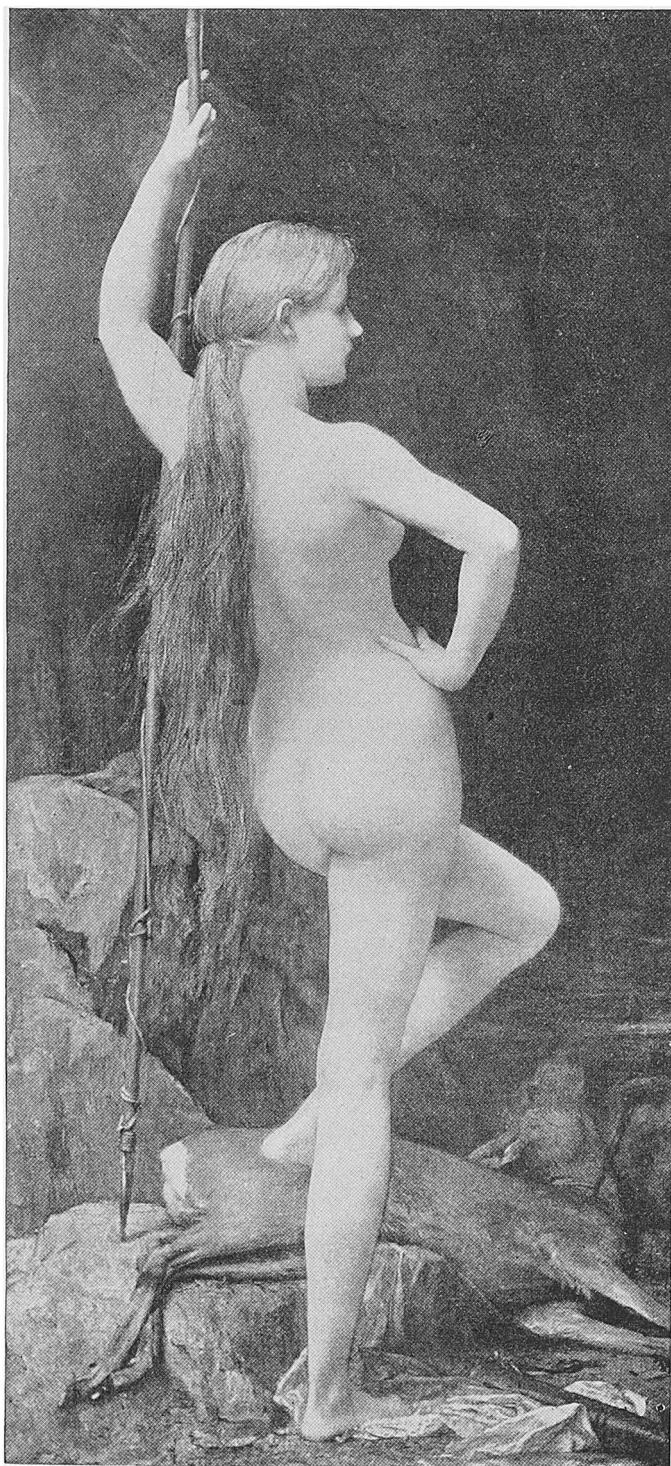
In appearance, M. Lefebvre has always been more conventional than is usually



MIGNON

the habit among artists. He is of medium height and build, and the rigors of many seasons of distinguished service as a teacher have whitened his hair. But they are the snows of honor, and his latest work advances rather than fails in strength along the lines of the high standard he has set.

The career of this artist suggests the observation that it is to the glory of France that her artists have more compensation than their own knowledge of good work done. A man who accomplishes something is recognized. The gov-



A HUNTING NYMPH

ernment interests itself in him, gives him work, and makes it possible for him to teach for art's sake and not as a means of livelihood. There are a great many points which France could still give us, in spite of the many things (desirable and otherwise) which we have already borrowed from abroad, and chief among these, embracing all these indeed, is the fact that governments may change, from Bonapartism to Boulangerism, but art will be protected through them all. The government itself may be in such a shape that a sensitive, quiet-loving man, like Casimir Périer, is unable to endure its exigencies ; but never will France bear the disgrace of having a great artist or architect to whom she offers a government appointment, refuse it, after careful investigation, because of the ignorant and inefficient scheme of administration to which he would be obliged to conform in the execution of his duty. When our government recognizes its artists as France does hers, then our great painters and sculptors will be honored at home and abroad as the American masters.